THE DOWAGER LADY TREMAINE.

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LADY TREMAINE.

BY

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THE

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CHAPTER I.

AN ANXIOUS LETTER.

In the breakfast-room of No. 3, Newburn Place, W., sat the Honourable Percy Tremaine frowning over a letter which he had just received. The Honourable Percy had risen earlier than usual on this particular morning in May, and the only reward for his virtue was this vexing letter. He did not *swear;* that much must be said to his credit; at any rate, he did not do so

aloud. What went on in his mind can only be guessed, but all the perturbation that showed itself outwardly was seen in a frowning face, an impatient shrug of the gentlemanly shoulders, and a rather savage movement of the white hands, as he folded up the letter and replaced it in its envelope. When neither the butler nor the parlour-maid was present, his voice might have been heard uttering a few polite anathemas on the devoted head of some unfortunate, or *fortunate*, absentee.

'Simply tyrannical! That is what I call it,' he muttered. 'To think that I should be ordered about in this way, to suit the whim of a woman of whom I know so little, and for whom I care so little, as Aunt Miriam Amberley! Now, I expect, if I refuse her invitation, she will alter her will, and cut me off with a shilling.

I could not stand that, though. Ah! good-morning, Katie,' he exclaimed, as a young girl entered the breakfast-room. 'Come here and look at this—I had nearly said "confounded letter," forgetting that the Tremaines are pledged not to use strong language. Here it is; and I expect that you will feel as inclined as I am to use rather strong language when you have taken in its contents.'

Kate Tremaine read the letter quietly through, and as her brother watched her, he noted with grim satisfaction the indignant flush which grew deeper and deeper on her fair cheek.

'Oh, Percy, what a shame! How dare she!' exclaimed the girl, at length raising her flushed face, with its indignant brown eyes, from the letter. 'To think of Aunt Miriam inviting you to that dull provincial

town when the season is at its gayest, and when we were expecting to have such a lovely time. She knows you dare not use strong language about it, as other young men would be sure to do, and that you are pledged to honour the old and the weak; and she takes advantage of that knowledge to tie you to her apron-strings for the summer. I cannot help saying it is shameful!'

'She knows something else also, my dear innocent girl. She knows that I cannot afford to offend her, as I sorely need her money. We are not rich people, my Kate, as I think you know; and though I do not get into debt, being, alas! pledged not to do so, I have never much spare cash, and that is the truth of the matter.'

'Then you mean to go?'

'What else could I do, my fair sister?'

'Well, I think it is just as dishonourable to be looking out for an old lady's favour, in the hope that she may leave you her money when she dies, as to use a few strong expressions, or to get a little into debt, or to marry again if your first wife dies. Yet all these things the Tremaines pledge themselves against, while scheming to get money is allowed to pass.'

'Yes, but that is a sin which is easier to hide than those sins which we are pledged to avoid, don't you know. And our Puritan ancestors, who originated those pledges — I nearly said "confounded" again — those old Puritans, in spite of their long faces, and their purity, and all that, had no objection to getting hold of all the money and all the property that they could. There is plenty of evidence to

warrant my saying this, and they did not always use the most honourable means, either.'

'Do not talk like that any more, Percy. I think I hear father coming downstairs, and he does not like it. He says that we are the very first of the Tremaines who have been in the least inclined to rebel against those pledges.'

'I cannot believe that; and as for the paterfamilias, bless him! he would have been a happier man these eight years had it not been for these con—for these vows. Without them he would probably have been acting now like a sensible man, instead of wearing away his dear old life in the company of myths and phantoms.'

'Percy Tremaine! what are you saying? I am ashamed of you!' exclaimed his sister in hot, indignant tones; and the next

moment a gray-haired, mournful-looking man entered the room, who, after bidding his children a quiet 'good-morning,' took his seat at the breakfast-table. Kate seated herself on his right hand and Percy on his left, both of the young people becoming very subdued as they noticed the look of far-away and dreamy gravity on their father's handsome face. They knew the look well, for it had appeared at intervals on his usually animated countenance ever since the death of their mother, some nine or ten years previously. They could only guess at its meaning, however, for very few words were spoken by Lord Tremaine on those occasions. Now and then he would address one or other of his children in this way :

'Kate, I saw your mother last night, and she gave me this message for you'—

then the message would be repeated to her. Or:

'Percy, my boy, I have been talking with your mother in the library, and she wishes you to do so and so.'

In spite of what he had hastily said to his sister concerning 'phantoms and myths,' Percy Tremaine, as well as Kate, stood in great awe of these communications, and also of their father's mood when repeating them.

On this occasion, looking up from his seat a few moments after taking it, Lord Tremaine said to the butler, who was gray-haired like himself:

'Symes, I perceive that there is no place set opposite me. Please see to that at once.'

Without any change of countenance, Symes did as he was bidden, but Kate

and Percy could not avoid exchanging glances. No one had ever been allowed to occupy the seat of Lady Tremaine since her death, either in the London house or at the old hall in the South of England; and though Lord Tremaine did not refer to the subject, on these days when his children noticed the strange far-away look in his eyes, he was wont to gaze earnestly, from time to time, towards the opposite end of the table, as if scrutinizing some beloved, but to those around invisible, features.

Before breakfast was quite over, Lord Tremaine roused himself sufficiently to ask if there were any letters. His son and daughter, however, had been the only recipients that morning, and the former handed his aunt's epistle over to his father for his perusal. Having read it, Lord Tremaine looked up and said :

'Do you intend to accept this invitation, Percy?'

'What would you advise me to do, father?'

'My boy, I cannot advise you in this matter. You must decide entirely for yourself. It would not be wise to offend your aunt, for many reasons; nevertheless, there might arise evils out of your visit to her which would be greater even than those which would follow on your displeasing her.'

'What sort of evils, father?'

'There might arise the evil of an unfortunate marriage,' replied Lord Tremaine quietly, fixing his eyes on his son's face.

The Honourable Percy started.

'Father!' he exclaimed, almost indignantly.

'Yes, my boy, your mother warns you to beware.'

Lord Tremaine spoke these words solemnly and emphatically; then he left the room, and entered his own private sanctum on the other side of the hall. Percy and his sister were once more alone together, for the servants had disappeared before their master's last sentence had been spoken.

'How strange and weird it all seems!' exclaimed Kate. 'Oh, Percy, do you think we, too, are endowed with this wonderful gift of "second sight," which seems to possess father, and which all the Tremaines are supposed to have?'

'I do not know, Kate. At any rate, I am glad that we are precluded by our vows from forcing anything of the kind, and from using any sort of mesmeric powers that we may possess. It is only when such things come naturally and

spontaneously that they are to be endured for a moment, and I trust fervently that to the end of my life I may be free from anything of the kind. But let us change the subject, Kate. What are you thinking of doing to-night? I have a few days to remain in town, and I mean to enjoy them.'

'Oh, Percy, will you take me to the opera to-night, if we can get seats? For my part, I am glad that our vows do not preclude our going occasionally to see a good opera or play. I had several invitations for to-night, but have not accepted any of them, so I shall be free if you are.'

'I have nothing of importance on hand, little one, so we will enjoy ourselves in our own way to-night, and I will go at once and try to secure seats.'

'Oh, Percy, it will be dreadful when you are gone, for I shall be obliged to

depend on Cousin Charlie Meredith's wife to chaperon me everywhere.'

'Well, she is a nice little woman enough, is she not?'

'Oh, nice enough for you, but not for me. She can talk about nothing but men, and she flirts terribly. Still, I believe she is good-hearted, and certainly better than some. I wonder when father will allow me to attend more than one affair in an evening.'

'Do not be in too great a hurry for that, my fair sister. You will soon lose your natural bloom, and have to resort to artificial helps, like my Lady Meredith, if you become an out-and-out Society dame, don't you know.'

With which words of brotherly warning Percy Tremaine left his sister, and went to secure stalls for that evening's opera.

CHAPTER II.

FAMILY VOWS.

In the days of old, before the family gained its title, a certain John Tremaine had turned Puritan. He was an eccentric person, and thought a great deal of himself and of his own judgment. It was said that he was in the habit of seeing visions and dreaming strange dreams with a meaning, but he was not the first Tremaine who had held this reputation, neither was he to be the last. It was this John Tremaine who instituted the queer pledges and vows which had to be taken by every

heir of the Tremaines before reaching man's estate. He himself took these vows and pledges, and caused his son to do the same. They were mostly vows of purity and wholesome living; precluding swearing and drinking, enforcing honour to parents, and to the weak and old. But there was one pledge which differed in character from the rest, and which was only laid down as a law on account of old John Tremaine's personal feeling in the matter. He had suffered in his youth through his stepmother, and having himself kept faithful to his own wife, who had died young, he instituted a pledge binding every heir of the house of Tremaine to *one* wife only. A similar vow was to be taken by the bride of the heir before her marriage. And this John Tremaine, who thought himself somewhat of a prophet,

had also been good enough to predict that, should this vow be kept, an heir would never fail to the house of Tremaine; but should it be broken, or should there be any unfaithfulness between husband and wife, the direct line would immediately come to an end.

The present Lord Tremaine was the first of the line since that time who outlived his wife, and he was keeping strictly to his pledge, and felt no inclination to do otherwise, for he had loved her dearly, and had chosen her somewhat late in life. The vows taken by the heirs of Tremaine had materially helped to keep them from hurrying into imprudent marriages. There were similar vows to be taken by the younger sons, and also by the women of the house; but these do not concern us, and need not be further dealt with.

The Honourable Percy Tremaine was the first of his line who felt disposed to protest against these vows. Not that he had any vicious tendencies, but, unlike his forefathers, he had been educated at one of the great public schools, and then at Oxford, where he felt some of his pledges to be rather burdensome, chiefly because some of his companions, being young men of the world, ridiculed these pledges as the unreasonable vagaries of a mad ancestor of the Tremaines. But if old John Tremaine was a madman, as he was held to be, not only by a few of the youth of the present generation, but by some of his contemporaries and friends, it could not be denied that there was a certain amount of reason in his madness. Many of the vows which he had instituted had proved a stay and backbone to characters which, left to them-

selves, might have weakly yielded to the vices of their time.

In relation to the gifts of 'second sight' and intuition which were supposed to be in the family, old John Tremaine had shown his good sense by adding to his list of vows one which precluded any definite inquiry into the mystery of spiritualistic experience, or any deliberate seeking for such experience. Such visions as came were to be looked upon as God-given, but what were sought for were not to be traced to that sacred source. The generations which followed had kept healthy in mind and body, taken as a whole. The husbands loved and clung to their wives, and the wives to their husbands. Worldly pleasure had been indulged in with moderation, the men were strong and handsome, the women

healthy and beautiful, and, in spite of a few complainings, both Kate and Percy Tremaine felt in their hearts thankful to their eccentric ancestor who had instituted the vows which they had been compelled to take in early youth.

But another and more powerful influence even than his vows had come into the life of Percy Tremaine while he was at school. His was the kind of nature which unfolds best when steadied by leaning against someone stronger in character and moral tone. Though healthy in mind and strong in body, Percy Tremaine was not very self-reliant, and the strengthening influence of a really helpful boy-friendship came into his life just at the right time, when he was in some danger of being led, by lads of a more daring and vicious type, not only to regard his vows with a sort of good-

humoured impatience, but even with such contempt as would have ultimately led either to his ignoring them altogether or wilfully breaking loose from their restraint.

One day, while at Roden School, Percy was trying to explain to some of his wild and reckless companions the nature of the vows which he was required to take. They were turning everything he said into ridicule, when the group was joined by the head boy of the school, one of those boys who are born to rule, and one whom all treated with respect, and many regarded with sincere affection. Lionel Forsyth had lately lost both his parents. His father, who was a soldier, had died abroad, and the shock of the news had proved too great a blow to his mother, who was a delicate woman, so that a month or two later, just as he was attain-

ing the highest honours of the school, the boy found himself an orphan, cast on the mercy of an uncle from whose influence and example his parents had carefully guarded him. Lionel had been so well trained by both his father and his mother that he had passed unscathed so far through his pathway in life. He had chosen his companions from among the best boys at Roden, and having an intense loathing of everything vile and evil, he had used all his natural ruling power from the first in putting down all the wrong that came in his way; and so great was his personal influence that his schoolfellows soon learned, if they planned anything mean or underhanded, it would have to be done out of Forsyth's sight. He was feared by the bad boys as well as loved by the good.

In his uncle's home, however, Lionel found that he would be required to lead a different life altogether if there was to be any peace for him. It was a reckless household. His uncle, Sir Anthony Forsyth, was an unmarried man who went his own way, and the way of the world, without thought or care for his future, and he wished his nephew to follow in his own footsteps. That nephew, however, was horror-stricken at what he saw in his uncle's home and life, and turned from it with a sickening sense of loathing. Sir Anthony was ready to make much of the boy, and would have treated him like a prince if he had been able to force him to do as he wished. But when he found Lionel obstinate, he flew into a terrible passion, and sent him back to Roden, telling him that there he should stay,

holiday or no holiday, until he had learned to submit to his betters. The master of the house where Lionel boarded was astonished to have the boy sent back to him in disgrace, but a few quiet, guarded words that fell from Lionel soon let in some light on the matter, and the tutor felt that he had more reason than ever to honour such a nobly developing character as that which he found in this young pupil of his.

The holidays were again approaching—they were the Christmas holidays, and Sir Anthony had written to Lionel begging him to fit into his ways of living, and offering him baits in the way of glowing accounts of the various pleasures which he would have that Christmas if he would only submit, pleasures the mere description of which was enough to make the heart of

any healthy-minded boy beat fast, and Lionel was a thoroughly healthy-minded boy. Now he was *tempted*, terribly tempted, for he knew too well how dull it would be at Roden when all the boys had left and his tutor had gone to spend Christmas with friends.

Lionel Forsyth was pondering over these things on the evening when he entered the schoolroom and found a group of boys gathered round the fire discussing Tremaine's addle-headed vows, as one boy was pleased to call them, and he was soon interested in the talk.

'Tremaine,' he said, 'come here and tell me quietly about these vows.'

Tremaine rose and left the group of boys, and he and Forsyth settled themselves in the recess of a window, where they could talk without being interrupted.

'And are you soon to take these pledges, Tremaine?' asked Lionel.

'Yes, during these holidays, when I shall be fifteen; but some I took when I was quite a little fellow.'

'Well, Tremaine, I'll tell you what—I should like to take those pledges too; and I will, if you can send me a copy here, for I've got to remain at school these holidays.'

'You, Forsyth? Never!'

'I have, though. You see, I have no home now, Tremaine, and I cannot get on at my uncle's, so he won't have me; and if I take these vows, he is all the more likely to banish me. But just you send me a copy, and I'll sign them, and next term, and all the rest of our lives, we'll see who can keep them best; and, Tremaine, mind, those boys are only cads who call them

names. You stick to them, my boy, and I'll help you.'

'Thanks awfully, Forsyth,' said Tremaine, with a flush of pride at being so much noticed by the head of the school. 'But,' he added, 'don't you think of staying here, Forsyth. I know the pater will like you, because you are going to sign these pledges, and if you come home with me, I am sure he will make it right with your uncle.'

'Well, I shall be only too glad, thanks, Tremaine, if your father can get Sir Anthony's consent. You see, he is my guardian now, and I have to submit to him as far as I can.'

Lord Tremaine not only obtained Sir Anthony's consent, but also an intimation that he might take the young rascal for good and all if he liked. So it came to

pass that Lionel Forsyth spent a good deal of time with the Tremaines, and his influence over Percy was always for good ; and as for Kate, she regarded him as another brother. Lady Tremaine also, up to the time of her death, felt for him as for a son. He was now Sir Lionel Forsyth, as, before many years had passed, Sir Anthony succumbed to his excesses, and died repentant, leaving Lionel sole heir to the title and the estates.

CHAPTER III.

TWIN SOULS.

MRS. ARCHIBALD AMBERLEY sat in her artistically and elegantly-furnished drawing-room waiting for her guest. That guest was no other than the Honourable Percy Tremaine, her great-nephew. Mrs. Amberley was aunt to the late Lady Tremaine, and had rather disgraced herself in the eyes of some of her aristocratic relatives by marrying a rich manufacturer. She was quite a middle-aged woman when her marriage took place, and she asked leave of no one, but took her own course.

She had now been a widow for some two years, and since her husband's death she had visited London and become interested in the family of her niece, Lady Tremaine, more especially in the handsome and aristocratic Percy. His appearance of careless strength and grace quite fascinated the old lady, who determined to make him her heir, should he prove a tractable and dutiful nephew.

Mrs. Amberley did not hesitate to make known her intentions in the Tremaine family, and the Honourable Percy was quite human enough to feel a good deal elated at the prospect of one day becoming a rich man, for riches had not abounded in the Tremaine family for many generations; not, indeed, since the time of the father of old John, the man who had instituted these unusual pledges. This earlier Tremaine

had been a spendthrift, and had gone a good way towards ruining his house and forfeiting his estate ; but the quiet way of living and wholesome habits of his descendants had warded off ruin, and even done something to retrieve the fallen fortunes of the family. Still, riches did not abound, and Percy Tremaine felt that his wisest plan was to fall in with his aunt's wishes, even though they might somewhat cross his own, and he therefore decided to accept her invitation to visit her at Histringham. The old lady had been delighted on receiving the young man's polite and gentlemanly response to her invitation.

'Here is a young man who knows on which side his bread is buttered,' she said to herself, 'and we shall get on together, I think.'

Mrs. Amberley was not only a very rich

old lady, but a very popular one in the town of Histringham. She had always taken a delight in surrounding herself with young people. Her croquet lawn (it was before the days of tennis) was one of the most frequented in the place, and her croquet-parties, garden-fêtes, and dances were thoroughly appreciated. Her husband had been a keen billiard-player, and the billiard-room was still open to many of his friends, both young and old. Playing for money was never allowed in Mrs. Amberley's house, but that did not seem to make any difference to the enjoyment of the players. Mrs. Amberley crowed in secret over the coming of her guest. There were some young girls among her acquaintances who were educated, and refined, and lady-like, and in whose welfare Mrs. Amberley took a keen interest. If

Percy Tremaine were to pick up one of them, it would be a great feather in her cap. So thought the old lady, having no knowledge of the strange 'beware' which had left the lips of Lord Tremaine on the morning of the arrival of her invitation at Newburn Place.

When the Honourable Percy took leave of his father and sister, the old man spoke again on the subject with good sense and feeling; for, in spite of his strange experiences, he was a sound-minded and intelligent man.

'Cheer up, Percy, my boy,' he said, seeing that his son looked somewhat downhearted. 'You have seen your aunt Amberley several times. She is a lady herself, and it is very unlikely that at her house you will meet with any but ladies and gentlemen; for I think it a great

mistake to put down everyone who happens to be in trade, or in a lower social position than ourselves, as vulgar or unrefined. The highest education is received by many who are much our inferiors in social position, and many of them have as refined feelings as ourselves, and as truly noble natures. I should be sorry for you to wed out of your own rank, but trust to your discretion, and I am sure that wherever you go you will prove yourself a true gentleman in both mind and manners, and I could not say this of all who belong to the peerage of Great Britain.'

Forsyth met Tremaine at St. Pancras Station, and, having some minutes to spare, the two young men took a few turns up and down the platform together before Percy entered his railway-carriage.

'You will be sure to write me, old

fellow, will you not?' asked Sir Lionel. 'I am more interested in this provincial visit of yours than I was when I saw you off to New York. I have a sort of feeling —I cannot define it—that great things will issue out of this visit you are making. Perhaps you will meet your twin soul at Histringham. Who knows? If you do, and she has a twin sister, send for me, you know, at once.'

'If I do,' returned Percy, with a slight curl of the lip. 'But, Forsyth, I think you are the one most likely to come across our twin sisters in town. Send for me by all means if you do; I shall need no second bidding, I can assure you.'

'Trust me,' answered Forsyth, grasping his friend's hand as he turned to enter the carriage; and soon the train was snorting

and puffing away towards Histringham, bearing with it the Honourable Percy, who felt as if a strange cloud hung over him, a kind of fitful presentiment which he could not account for or control. He and Forsyth had often described to one another the sort of wife each would choose for himself, and, strange to say, they had in their minds such precisely similar ideals that they had decided their future wives would have to be twin sisters. Only there was this difference: While Forsyth felt that he must rule his wife and be her master, though finding in her a true friend and companion, to whom he would be devoted heart and soul, Tremaine leaned towards a bride with power over him, a strong original mind which should lead him rather than be led by him. The two young men were rather fond of talking

about their sister souls, but so far the matter had been more a joke than a serious scheme—on the part of Percy Tremaine, at any rate.

CHAPTER IV.

FINDING OUR IDEAL.

'My dear boy, how pleased I am to see you! And to think of your leaving your town pleasures at this season to visit an old woman! That is indeed good of you!'

Such was the welcome given by Mrs. Amberley to her great-nephew as he entered her luxurious drawing-room for the first time.

'Very pleased indeed to come, aunt. Awfully good of you to ask me!' answered the young man. Then, as his aunt bustled

out to give her orders about the disposal of his luggage, he muttered: 'What a brute I am, and a hypocrite as well! I dare say the old lady knows well enough why I have condescended to visit her house; but, after all, should I not have been just as likely to do so had she been poor instead of rich? Let me think. Yes, I believe I should. The Tremaines, on the whole, are not an ungallant race; their vows preclude their being so, too. Come, cheer up, Percy, my boy. You are perhaps not such a very bad sort of fellow, after all. And now that I have come I must make the best of things, at any rate. Well, I must say it is not half bad here,' glancing round the elegantly-furnished room, which was in truth much more splendid than any apartment in either his father's town or country mansion.

Full of comforts as well as luxuries he found it to be, and so also was the bedroom to which he was soon shown, with its elegant little dressing-room attached. This was indeed a princely mansion, he thought, and the fashionable Percy Tremaine, with both mind and body in excellent condition, was not at all the sort of young man to despise comfort and luxury wherever he might find them. Besides, everything here was tasteful as well as luxurious, for, as Lord Tremaine had remarked, Mrs. Amberley was a lady, and would not be likely to care for mere ostentatious show. Exploring the grounds before breakfast the next morning, young Tremaine found them beautifully kept and arranged, and the greenhouses were the pride of Histringham. Both inside and out the flowers of the season were bloom-

ing. Observing a man engaged in arranging the croquet lawn, Tremaine asked the reason.

'Well, sir, you see, mistress has her "At home" afternoon Tuesdays, and there's sure to be a few young ladies wanting to play,' answered the man.

'So,' thought Percy. 'That is a nice free-and-easy sort of "At home" where the young folks play croquet. It will be better than talking, however, so I hope aunt will introduce me to some good players.'

That afternoon Mrs. Amberley's drawing-room was more crowded than was usual even for her. Nearly all her young lady acquaintances had heard of the expected visit of the Honourable Percy Tremaine, and were in a great hurry to make his acquaintance.

There was one tall, dark beauty whom Mrs. Amberley would have described as quite aristocratic in appearance, and in whose future she was much interested. It would be a fine thing for her, the old lady reflected, to marry into a peer's family, and she was determined to do her best to bring a match about between this girl, Miss Siston, and her handsome nephew.

On this first afternoon Percy showed to great advantage. His perfect manners pleased the girls, and even the air of calm and easy indifference which expressed the feelings with which he regarded these provincial beauties (and which he thought would let them know better than words that he was not for them) delighted and charmed them. 'Such a very aristocratic bearing' they thought he possessed. The dark Miss Siston displayed all her varied

charms; was his partner at croquet; sang a duet with him, and went home secure of having made a conquest. Percy had simply been polite to them all, but no one had moved him more deeply than another.

As he dressed for dinner, the young man pondered over his aunt's designs for him.

'It is quite evident,' he mused, 'that my aunt means me to find a wife among these rich merchant's daughters, and that dark beauty is her favourite. Well, she must be rich, if a multitude of diamond, ruby, and sapphire rings mean anything. And those bracelets! But no, my dear aunt; one thing I am dead set against, and that is marrying for money, and I will not do it to please you or anyone else. No; my little sweetheart, when I find her, must be everything to me. I would almost

prefer her to have no money. Her hair must be deep golden, her eyes deep violet, but her expression must be the deepest thing about her. She must be refined and pure-minded, but capable of great things. I will have no second-rate woman for my wife, thinking of nothing but dress and pleasure. Shall I ever meet her, my sweet ideal, I wonder? They say I shall be sure to wed one exactly opposed in every way to my ideal. I do not think so; but who knows? This world is a queer place, and we human beings are a queer contrary set, I well know. But I must respect my wife. Oh, how I must respect her!'

There was a garden fête the next day, and Percy Tremaine was introduced to still more fair damsels. But none of them stirred the depths of his heart more than

the first set had done. On Sunday he went with his aunt to St. Mary's parish church, a fine old edifice, with a splendidly-trained choir, and a learned and devout vicar. During the following week there was a picnic and a dance, besides many minor entertainments.

Kate wrote to her brother of the plays she was seeing in London, and her brother envied her. He was extremely fond of a good play, and the Histringham theatre did not suit his fastidious taste.

The second Sunday when young Tremaine took his seat in St. Mary's Church beside Mrs. Amberley, he noticed, seated a pew or two in front of them to the right, a fair golden head, crowned with a simple black and white hat. The side face he could see, and he noted the soft, sweet expression of the mouth, and the earnest

attention which the young girl who owned the head and mouth paid to the service all through. When the congregation rose to leave the church, Percy Tremaine turned for one more glimpse of the young lady. He almost started as he did so, for the face now turned towards him seemed at the moment the realization and fulfilment of all his dreams. He saw her bow to his aunt, and then she left the church by another door, not vouchsafing even a glance at Mrs. Amberley's handsome companion.

'Who is that girl, aunt?' asked the young man in a low tone.

'Oh, that is Miss Vivian. A sweet face, has she not?'

'Do you know her well, Aunt Amberley? I do not remember her face at any of the affairs we have attended this week, either

at your house or at the houses of other people.'

'I think she has been from home, Percy. Besides, I did not think of inviting her. She is a very quiet girl, and I have never seen her either dance or play croquet. I think she had some trouble a while ago; but the Vivians have not been long in Histringham, and as they seem very quiet, reserved sort of people, no one knows much about them, except that they do not appear to be very well off.'

'What do you mean by Miss Vivian having had a trouble lately, aunt? Surely it cannot have been in connection with a love affair. She looks too young for anything of that sort.'

'I think she is about seventeen. But it was not a love affair, I fancy, but a trouble over the death of a sister of whom

she was very fond; but I think she must always have been rather a quiet sort of little thing.'

'Well, she has plenty of character in her face; I should think she must be rather clever.'

'Oh, do you think so? I know she is fond of reading, and some of the Histringham girls speak very well of her; but the men do not seem able to fathom her quite. She came to one of my parties last winter, and certainly she seemed to appreciate music, and singing, and flowers.'

'Are you not going to invite her at all while I am here, aunt?'

'Most certainly, Percy, if you wish it; and I shall have much pleasure in doing so. But I do not think you will make much of her.'

Accordingly an invitation for the next

garden-party was sent to Miss Vivian. It was accepted, and all that morning Percy Tremaine was in a state of excitement. He must walk warily, he told himself, and show no very marked attention to this fair maiden, who seemed to him the fulfilment of his brightest dreams ; but he would watch her carefully, and try to divine her true character. She was shy as well as quiet, his aunt told him, but if she were all he thought her to be, he could afford to wait, and the more difficulties in the way of winning her, the sweeter it would be in the end. He forgot that the creature of his dreams had never been shy. However, this young girl, Myra Vivian, seemed to open in his presence like a flower before the sun. Everyone remarked the difference in her, and, indeed, her brighter manners caused some rather

ill-natured remarks amongst some of the other girls present. Percy forgot to be wary, and walked and talked with her as much as politeness to the other guests would allow him to do. Myra never seemed at all self-conscious, after her first shyness of him was overcome. She never seemed to notice that he was at all specially attentive to her; but all he saw of her that afternoon went to confirm him in his opinion that she was indeed his ideal, and the creature of his dreams.

They talked of books, of music, of flowers, and then the trouble came out, the story of the sister who had been dearer than life to the gentle Myra, and as she spoke, Percy remembered his friend, and when all the gaieties of the afternoon and evening were over, and he was alone in his room once more, he mused on the

strange fact which had transpired, that this girl, this Myra, whom he even now told himself he loved, should have had a twin sister, who had been like her, and who was dead.

'Poor Forsyth!' he murmured. 'As your twin is dead and gone, how can I write and call you here to meet her? What will you say when you know? Will you remain a bachelor always? Perhaps, perhaps. You have often told me you should not be at all surprised if you never met your heart's love, and never married. But how strange, how passing strange, that after all our jokes and nonsense on the subject I should meet my ideal, and that she should have once possessed a twin sister! It is like the Tremaine forewarnings, to be sure; and Forsyth, in spite of his manliness, is as bad as any Tremaine about these "twins."'

CHAPTER V.

DUFTON GROVE.

THE next morning Tremaine felt that he must ride, for his brain was full of thoughts, and he could not endure the idea of driving into the town with his aunt, and meeting a number of the young damsels among whom she was so popular. He might have enjoyed this a week earlier, but now he dreaded the thought of what he saw fit to regard as their empty chatter, and felt that he should have hard work to be even commonly polite to them that morning. So, pleading a headache, he

mounted his aunt's chestnut mare and rode away, determined again to visit a spot where he had been with his aunt's party of friends during the previous week, a most romantic spot, and rich in associations and suggestions, which could not fail to charm a poetic nature like his own. Dufton Grove was the name of the place, and as Tremaine rode along through the old-fashioned villages, with their thatched roofs and primitive surroundings, he felt glad to be thus alone with his thoughts.

It was a lovely June morning, that might well tempt any lover of the country away from the dusty town. Tremaine took the road by the side of the grove until he reached its further end, when Dufton Hall came into view.

'Now, if only Dufton were at home, I would call and see him,' mused Percy.

'But as it is, I should like to walk down that delicious shady grove, did I but know what to do with the mare.'

This question was soon settled for him. Out of the park gates at that very moment came a groom, who gladly undertook to lead the horse by the road to the round house at the other end, while Mr. Tremaine took the footpath through the grove.

Very lovely the grove looked on this fair June day, with its glorious elms on either side forming an almost unbroken line of arches all down the hill, and giving the place the appearance of some cathedral aisle, with the sun glinting through the windows on to the ground beneath. Percy Tremaine mused, as he walked, upon the sad fate of the young poet who had made the spot so famous.

Suddenly he came upon the fallen trunk

of an old tree, part of which formed a convenient seat, and, reposing on this impromptu resting-place, whom should he behold but the creature of his dreams, his golden-haired Myra! The surprise quite took the young man's breath away for the moment. To think that he should have come upon her thus unexpectedly! There she sat, holding a little book in her hand, but her beautiful violet eyes were fixed upon the distant hills, with a soft, far-away expression in them, and a tender little smile played about her mouth. The colour on her cheeks was most exquisite, and this added to her charms in the eyes of Percy Tremaine.

'What is she thinking of, I wonder,' he said to himself. 'I wish it might be about me; but no! it is the twin sister, of course. Well, perhaps, if I go to her, I

shall hear some more about that fair twin, who must have been good and lovely indeed if her sister has described her truly.' Then he approached the fallen tree, and said softly :

'Miss Vivian.'

The girl started, and turned her head in time for Tremaine to catch the full expression depicted on her fair countenance, and it almost startled him. It was so exactly what he and Forsyth had described to one another as their ideal expression for a woman's face. Forsyth, being something of an artist, had even brought it into one of his pictures. It was a look of deep, unutterable feeling, bringing out all that was best and strongest in the nature of the wearer. It told of depth of character, intensity of soul, purity of heart, passionate devotion, joy in living and loving, of in-

tellect, and poetic feeling, all in one. It did not pass quite away during the whole of their converse that morning; some of its phases even deepened, and some were always there. The girl did not seem taken aback by the sudden appearance of young Tremaine upon the scene, but held out her hand frankly.

When he asked about her book, a certain shyness and embarrassment seemed to seize her; but perceiving that he was genuinely interested in her and her reading, she became more at ease, and presently confessed to having been wishing for his presence, only a moment earlier. Percy Tremaine's heart beat faster as she made this confession, and he felt very well pleased and satisfied, especially when Miss Vivian made room for him beside her; then, showing him the book, she said:

'It is Tennyson's "In Memoriam." I have been making quite a study of it lately, and something I read this morning reminded me of last night. Do you remember Alice Garside ridiculing the idea of spirits returning to earth to visit their friends?'

'Yes, I remember well what that young lady said on the subject,' answered Tremaine.

'But you answered her in a way which made me think that you had some reason for differing from her, and I have been wondering what you really thought on the subject. I should so very, very much like to think that we could indeed sometimes see our own friends who have left us.'

'Then you have never had such an experience?' inquired Tremaine.

The girl's cheek flushed, and she bent her head as if half ashamed.

'I never speak of it,' she faltered, 'for I find that such experiences are ridiculed, and ridicule hurts so, when it is turned against some experience which is sacred to one.'

'Do not fear for an instant that I shall turn anything you tell me to ridicule, Miss Vivian. But may I ask what lines from "In Memoriam" brought these thoughts into your mind?'

Myra pointed them out, and Tremaine read aloud in his clear, expressive tones:

'"How pure of heart, and sound of head,
With what Divine affection bold,
Must be the man whose thought would hold
An hour's communion with the dead!"'

'That is so different from the opinion of most of the people, I know,' said Myra. 'They hold that all spiritualistic ex-

periences are the work of the devil, and that they come to any but pure-minded people.'

'The doings of One who was greater and purer than any of us were put down to the same source once, you may remember, Miss Vivian?'

The girl's face lighted up—'Oh, Mr. Tremaine, do you believe in all that?'

'Do you mean to ask whether I believe in what is now becoming so well-known as "the old-fashioned faith"? Yes, Miss Vivian, we Tremaines are an old-fashioned family, and the old faith is good enough for us. We also believe that the time will come when the mysteries of that faith will be to a great extent solved.'

'I am glad you believe in it; I do. But so many who believe in spiritualistic experiences make a religion of that, and let the other slip, when it seems to me the one

goes so wonderfully to prove the other: for if our friends can come to us in spirit form, surely God, who is a Spirit, may be a real personal God, and a Friend to mankind, who, believing in spirits, may worship Him in spirit and in truth.'

'I think my dear mother made those things clear to me when I was a very little ellow,' remarked Tremaine. 'Shall I tell you an experience of hers, Miss Vivian?'

'Oh, please do!'

'It was after the death of my baby sister, and my mother was fretting a great deal. Kate and I had flourished on, though we were but delicate as infants, and she feared that she had perhaps been too sure of this one, and also that, being in delicate health herself, she might have left her little one too much to the care of others. One night she was weeping and praying by the little empty cot, when she

was startled by a sudden radiant light, and, looking up, she beheld the figure of our Lord Jesus Christ, spiritual in form, yet perfectly distinct. In His arms He held her baby. Instantly there flashed across her mind the words, "He shall gather the lambs in His arms, and carry them in His bosom," and she was comforted, my dear mother.'

'That is very, very beautiful,' said Myra softly, and with glistening eyes. Then she continued in a low tone: 'Now, Mr. Tremaine, I will confess to you that I have seen my dear twin sister since she went away from me, but only for a moment, when she told me not to fret about her, as she was full of joy in her new life. But I fear I cannot be good enough for an "hour's communion," for, save for that one short visit she paid me, I have never seen her, though I often

fancy I feel her near. I have seen enough, however, to make me believe more strongly than ever in those lines of Tennyson's:

> '"Eternal form shall still divide
> Eternal soul from all beside."

And I shall know *her* when we meet.'

Percy Tremaine was silent for a moment. He was remembering that the Tremaines for many generations had not only been gifted with 'second sight' and intuition themselves, but that they had also seldom failed to choose for their wives women who were gifted in the same way. Then his heart opened, his impulsive nature got the better of him, and he told his companion all—about the Tremaine gift of 'second sight,' especially about his father's gift; about the Tremaine vows; about his friend Forsyth and their talks together;

and how he discovered in her his ideal, his love.

The girl was bewildered and confused at first. She hardly knew what to reply.

'I have never, never met any man I liked so much as you,' she said at last simply.

'Then, my darling, will you not try to do something more than like me—to love me a little?' asked Tremaine eagerly. 'We have only met three times, but I feel I shall never meet another on earth whom I shall prefer to you; and if you will only think a little kindly of me, and give me your answer as soon as you are ready, I shall be satisfied.'

So it was arranged. And when Myra reached her home, she threw herself into her mother's arms, and besought her to tell her what she ought to do.

'My darling, do you think you will love this man when you know him better?' asked the mother. 'I am proud,' she continued, 'to think that you should have made such a conquest, and I trust his friends will not think you too much beneath him in rank. But do not marry without love, my child.'

'Mother,' said the girl, laying her head on Mrs. Vivian's shoulder, 'I believe I love him—I am sure I do. Not so much as Helen, of course; but, then, I know she was part of me, and I do not suppose I could ever love anyone as I loved her. Oh, how I wish she was here and knew Mr. Tremaine! They would get on splendidly together. I wish mine were a stronger nature like hers. She would have made him a better wife far than I can hope to do. But I do care for him, and chiefly

I think, because he likes to hear me talk of Helen.'

It was not long before Tremaine had an answer in the affirmative to his heart's fond hopes. The second time he asked her to become his wife he was accepted, and that night he wrote to Forsyth, telling him of his love and his joy, but condoling with his friend about the death of the other twin.

'If she were only here, you would love her, I know. But you must love my Myra as a sister, for there is scarcely one feature in her nature or her appearance which does not accord with our ideal. Only she will not rule me, I think. But what of that?'

When Forsyth read this letter, his face took an expression of strange, deep feeling.

'If she be really like my ideal, I regret indeed that her twin sister is not living,'

he mused. 'However, Percy, my dear fellow, I congratulate you from my heart! But what will your father and sister think of your marriage with a Histringham girl? Will they remember their ancient name and lineage, and bring it up against you as a reproach? or will they show themselves truly noble and knightly, believing in love as the best of gifts?' Then he turned to the latter part of the letter, which contained an urgent request from Percy that he would visit Histringham and be introduced to his bride-elect. 'Yes, I will go,' thought Forsyth; 'but it will be only a flying visit, before I leave England. Those estates in the West Indies are a burden to me. I have a great mind to sell them. But see Percy and his bride-elect before starting I must and will, if possible.'

CHAPTER VI.

SIR LIONEL AT HISTRINGHAM.

LORD TREMAINE and his daughter each received a letter from Percy on the same morning as Sir Lionel Forsyth. The Baron took the news very quietly, but Kate noticed a shade of trouble cross her father's brow as he read his son's letter.

'I am sure Percy would choose none but a lady for his wife,' he remarked to his daughter; 'and as for her being the daughter of a not very successful solicitor —well, that cannot be helped; and Percy says he is a most gentlemanly fellow, and

the mother a sweet little woman, belonging to a good old family. But somehow, Kate, it seems not just what I should have liked. I think, though, from Percy's description, the girl must be very charming, yet she cannot be quite the sort his mother would have chosen for him; someone womanly and good, but strong-willed and self-reliant, was her idea of a wife for our boy.'

'Well, father,' responded Kate, 'I feel very much inclined to be angry with Percy for behaving like this, after all he said about provincials, too, and I shall not pretend to be pleased.'

Lord Tremaine's letter to his son was kind in the extreme, but that of Kate was rather sharp at the commencement. Towards the end, however, she softened down, and wished her brother 'all the

happiness in the world.' She had entertained her own ideas concerning what her brother's bride should be, and of his wedding any less a personage than an Earl's daughter she had never dreamed. Kate was at this time going through somewhat of a love trouble on her own account. Her father wished her to marry Viscount Harrington, an elderly man of good reputation and old family. But Kate's heart was set on a younger son of the Earl of Brightlands, a man of no reputation. He was an officer in a crack regiment, and desperately in love with Kate, whose vows, however, precluded her marrying any but a man who was ready to take upon himself, and keep, the Tremaine vows. In spite of her suffering, she was glad of these vows, for the poor girl felt that, loving as she did, and being loved as

she undoubtedly was by this man, she would most likely have weakly yielded to the pleading of her lover, in spite of all she knew concerning him, had she not been so tied and bound. The Viscount she was determined not to marry, because she did not love him, so the only prospect for her at present seemed that of remaining an old maid, for the sake of a man who was looked upon by everyone as a reprobate.

Sir Lionel Forsyth visited Histringham a few days after receiving his friend's letter. The moment he beheld Myra Vivian in Mrs. Amberley's garden, he felt that Percy had rightly described her, and that she was indeed their ideal woman in almost every respect. His heart beat tumultuously as he took her hand in his, and as he looked with his intense look deep into her violet

eyes the girl's face flushed, and, drawing her hand away, she seated herself quickly, and during the whole of that evening spoke very little. Percy was rather disappointed at this. He looked curiously at her once or twice, and then at his friend, who seemed to be making an effort to be lively, but who appeared to notice every movement of the fair young girl, and, when she did speak, listened with deep interest to her words. Percy thought he had never seen such an intense expression in his friend's eyes, or such a grave one. Later, when walking home with his betrothed, the young man rallied her on her silence.

'I think your friend frightened me a little, Percy,' she replied. 'He is very tall and handsome, and just what you described, except that I do not think you told me he could look so stern.'

'Stern! Lionel! Why, I never thought him stern as a rule. I know he can become so, but it is generally when he hears of some wrong-doing or mean action. He can be stern then with a vengeance. But I noticed the look you mean to-night, darling. I wonder what in the world he was thinking about.'

When young Tremaine entered the smoking-room that night for a last cigar, he found Forsyth already settled there.

'My dear fellow, how can I congratulate you enough?' exclaimed the latter, springing up and seizing his friend's hand.

'You were pleased, then?'

'Pleased! that is scarcely the word—I was enchanted! And, Percy, I wish with all my heart that the twin sister was still alive.'

'Ah, yes! so do I, Lionel. Myra was

very quiet to-night, but you must not think she is always like that, Forsyth. She can brighten up wonderfully sometimes, and there is a charm in her talk, when she once begins, such as I have seldom known in a woman. When she gets on the subject of her twin sister, it is specially so. There is no subject on which I like so well to hear her talk as that.'

'She was quiet, as you say, Percy; but you know I always liked a woman with quiet manners, and I never am misled, I believe, by such quietness. I observed your Myra narrowly, and I saw she was no mere bread-and-butter miss, but, in spite of her youth, a true-hearted, deep-souled woman, not yet quite awake or alive to all that in the future will interest and charm her, but unfolding hour by hour like a tender rosebud.'

Percy was delighted to hear his friend speak thus of his betrothed, and began to enlarge upon her highly-strung nervous temperament, which caused her at times to be able to hold communion with the spirit world.

'It is strange, is it not, that the Tremaines always fall in with such wives?' he asked.

'It certainly is strange,' responded Forsyth. 'But, Tremaine, do not let that little sweetheart of yours lose herself among mists of spiritualism. It will only do her harm. Tell her, will you not? how you are precluded by a vow from going in for anything of that sort. Those who make a pursuit of that kind of thing so often come to a full stop in their religion, and make a religion of the other, don't you know; and I should be sorry for that girl to be without

her religion, for she is a sensitive little soul, and will need it to help her in her walk through life. With it, she will be safe.'

'But surely, Forsyth, you do not mean to insinuate that, as my wife, Myra will have much to hurt her sensitive nature?

'No, my dear fellow; I am certain that with you she will be as free from trials and crosses as a woman could be. But there is no way of entirely guarding those sensitive souls. They will get pricked, and it needs a higher Power than that of man to sustain them wholly.'

'Do you know, Forsyth, that I am quite an earnest-minded fellow when I talk with Myra? I am rather a gay, careless young man about town and at home, and I am often surprised at my sober conversations with my darling.'

'At any rate, Tremaine, you do not hide your colours. Everyone in town knows of your stainless honour, and your high sense of religion, and all that. But I did think your wife would have been a gayer sort of woman, on the whole. I admire the quiet style, but that is just one of the few differences in our ideas about women.'

'That quietness of manner sometimes entirely leaves Myra; I think she will grow livelier every year now, and perhaps she will prove the ruler even yet. But I wonder how the twin sister was in those two respects?'

His eyes met those of Forsyth at that moment. The latter turned to knock the ash from off his cigar, and as he did so he remarked:

'Most likely just the same, Tremaine, yielding, and yet not weak; tender and

loving, and yet possessing depth and decision of character. Not born to rule, and yet leading; growing more self-reliant every year, yet always relying most on those who are stronger. No, Percy, I don't mean to give up my ideal twin, my twin soul and Myra's twin sister. We may meet yet, and be one in another world, don't you think?'

Percy Tremaine fidgeted a little in his chair, and at last said rather coldly:

'She seems so one with Myra, that I don't feel inclined to give her up to anyone, though she may be in heaven.'

'My dear fellow, surely you do not want to keep both sisters in your possession? Let me have the pleasure of looking forward to meeting the spirit one, at any rate. That can do you no harm; and, seriously, Tremaine, I am glad I shall be

abroad at the time of your wedding. I tell you, it would be positive pain to me to be present, and to remember that we had always hoped to be married on the same day, and that there was no twin sister on earth for me. I could not stand it, I believe, strong man as I am.'

'Oh, Lionel, I hate to think of your not being in town then. Don't you think you could get back by October?'

'I tell you frankly, Tremaine, that I shall not try. But, all the same, I wish you joy, my dear fellow, from the bottom of my heart. What I wonder at is your taking things so quietly.'

'I never am noisy about anything, don't you know, Forsyth.'

'Well, I grant that you are not, Tremaine. But what does your aunt Amberley say about this match? I thought her very

lively this evening, and she certainly seems fond of your bride-elect.'

'Oh, aunt fumed a little at first. Then she came round, like Kitty, and wished me joy. She had a rich girl in her mind for me, and no one had approached Miss Vivian until I brought her out. They are all for show here, it seems to me. But I say, Forsyth, look at the clock! We shall have a lecture to-morrow if we do not retire at once. Good-night, old chap.'

'Good-night, Percy, and may you have sweet dreams of your bride-elect and of her twin sister!'

'Strange,' answered Tremaine musingly; 'it's always the twin sister of whom I do dream.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNPLEDGED TREMAINE.

The wedding was over, and the happy pair had left England to spend their honeymoon at Madeira. Lord Tremaine and his daughter Kate passed the latter part of the autumn at Brighton, for the old Baron was feeling anything but strong. Both had grown very fond of Myra, for the girl seemed to warm and expand in their presence, as though recognising some kinship of soul between herself and her lover's family.

Before they had known each other long,

all Kate's secret heart had been laid bare before the eyes of her sympathizing friend. It seemed that her prospects were now about to grow brighter, for Captain Egerton had left his old life behind him, and had taken to a new course. His love for Kate Tremaine was so deep and sincere that the desire of his life was to become worthy of her; and although she knew an indefinite time of waiting must pass before the fulfilment of her hopes, Kate felt altogether happier. She began soon, however, to have another cause of anxiety, for while they were at Brighton her father's health failed visibly, and before the honeymoon was over the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine had to be recalled, in order to bid the old man farewell.

It was a sad ending to the happy time which they had been spending in the

beautiful island of Madeira, and Percy, who had dearly loved his father, grew quite melancholy after he became Lord Tremaine, and could not for some months bear that anyone should address him by that title. He feared also that on the day before his marriage he had grieved the Baron by refusing to allow his bride-elect to sign the papers which were usually signed by the brides of the heirs of Tremaine. He scarcely knew by what motive he had been impelled, but the conviction fixed itself firmly in his mind that Myra should not pledge herself against marrying a second time in case of his death.

Lord Tremaine had seemed a good deal put about by this decision on the part of his son, but he had always been a yielding man, and he gave way at last in the matter. Myra knew of the vow, and

gently reproached her betrothed for not allowing her to take it.

'I would have done so gladly,' she said.

'My darling, I am not going to have you tied and bound like that. What you do in such matters must be of your own free will,' answered Tremaine.

The days of mourning for the old lord were scarcely ended in that faithful household, when an heir was born to the house of Tremaine; and shortly after this event Kate left England to be married to her betrothed in India, and Sir Lionel Forsyth returned from his travels. He did not, however, visit his friend very often, and, except at their club or in society, Percy seldom met him. It happened, however, occasionally, at receptions and 'at homes,' that Forsyth would come across Lord and

Lady Tremaine, and the former would then rally him about keeping so distant.

'You are more like a stranger than a friend now, Forsyth,' said Tremaine on one occasion.

'No, my dear fellow, do not say that; you know that I have no other friend who is to me what you are.'

'Why do you not call on us oftener, then? You get on splendidly with most women, and it hurts me to see that you do not hit it off with my wife.'

Shortly after this, when Forsyth thought his friend was at Tremaine Hall, he was surprised to see him one day walk into the club.

'Oh, I am only here for one night,' he explained, in answer to Forsyth's inquiry. 'I am going off on a yachting cruise with Belmont and some others. My wife is

still at Tremaine, and if you happen to be in that direction, go and see her, Forsyth. You'll find her ever such an interesting little woman when you get her to yourself; and you know how anxious I have always been for you two to become good friends.'

'There are some books in your library at Tremaine,' answered Forsyth, 'which I very much want to consult. I was intending to come to you for a day, so I will call, even though you will not be there, as I was hoping would be the case.'

'Do,' said Lord Tremaine.

When the two friends had parted, Forsyth, as he walked home, turned over many thoughts in his busy brain.

'Why have I not oftener visited the Tremaines since Percy's marriage?' he asked himself. 'It seems a strange thing that the thought of that twin sister, so like

the living one, should always prevent my enjoying life as I used to do. Perhaps if I go down to Tremaine, and have a chat with Lady Tremaine, she may tell me something about that twin sister. It may be, if she is the one I ought to have married, that in days to come, in another world, we shall meet and love, as we were not permitted to do here. But fancy Tremaine leaving that glorious woman for the sake of mere pleasure! Should I have left her twin sister so? Never! Still, Tremaine's is a different temperament to mine, though we agree in so many things. I wonder, are they really happy together, those two? Tremaine looks flourishing enough, and yet at times I fancy I detect an unsatisfied, yearning look in his face, which was not born there. Then, his wife and he seem to live lives apart, in spite of

their union, and in spite of their child. They say Lady Tremaine has developed wonderfully in some ways since her marriage, and is quite appreciated at Tremaine, though she is thought very quiet, and some poor souls think she has nothing in her. What a mistake! Yes, I think I should enjoy a chat with her, if she will only open to me a little. I must say I have always found her exceptionally quiet, and even shy, though that has never for a moment deceived me. There is really a buoyant, lively, dreamy nature held down by some invisible chain, which ever prevents it from rising to its full height; and though a few appreciate her, it seems to me that to a great extent she is one of those flowers that are

> '"Born to blush unseen,
> And waste their sweetness on the desert air."

I know one thing: that I would never have allowed her sister to "blush unseen," or "waste her sweetness on the desert air." I would have brought her out as much as I could. But I should have wanted to keep the very best of her to myself, of course.'

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR LIONEL AT TREMAINE HALL.

When Sir Lionel Forsyth was ushered into the drawing-room at Tremaine Hall a few days later, he found Lady Tremaine alone with her boy. The little fellow, tired with romping, had fallen asleep on a lounge, and very beautiful he looked as he lay there, with his chubby little mouth still wearing a smile, as though in his dreams he was still at that merry game which his mother had been sharing with him not many minutes before. His hair was golden like her own, and one stray curl had fallen over the broad forehead.

His cheeks were flushed and rosy, and one little hand rested in that of his mother, who sat beside him, looking like a picture herself, with the lovely colour and bright eyes which her exercise and fun with her boy had served to increase. The sun, shining on her bright hair, made it look like a glorious halo of gold, and Forsyth came forward reverently, feeling as if he were in the presence of something holy, which it was profanity to disturb.

Lady Tremaine welcomed him half shyly, and after he was seated a moment, a hush of silence ensued, for Forsyth could not all at once shake off the feeling of almost awe which had come over him on entering the room.

Then he looked at the sleeping boy, and spoke admiringly of him to his mother. She responded at once :

'He is indeed a darling, Sir Lionel; but do you consider him like his father?'

'More like you, Lady Tremaine, is he not?'

'Perhaps,' she answered musingly. 'But most of all he resembles my twin sister, Helen, who died. You have perhaps heard my husband speak of her, Sir Lionel?'

'Yes, Lady Tremaine; he has mentioned her several times.' Then he thought to himself, 'It is evident that Tremaine has never told his wife about our twin sisters, or regretted Helen's death on my account in her presence.'

Lady Tremaine continued: 'It will be much more for his future welfare and happiness if my boy should prove to have Helen's nature rather than mine. We were very much alike in many ways. In

looks we were much the same, except that her features were more perfect than mine. But in Helen's nature there was a strength and self-reliance, and a power over others, which I do not possess naturally. And though those attributes are developing in me more and more as I grow older, I know I shall never be quite so self-reliant as she was.'

'Do you know, Lady Tremaine, I consider too great self-reliance rather a failure in a woman's nature. I like a woman to be able to rely on herself if need be, or at any rate to be able and willing to rely on a higher than earthly power. But, to me, there is a charm in a certain amount of dependence in a woman's character.'

'You are different from Percy in these matters, Sir Lionel. He would, I think, like me to be more self-reliant, for I do

not fancy he is of a very self-reliant nature himself, and it may be that I am not quite as much of a stay to him as I might be. But the worst is my over-sensitiveness and dreaminess of nature. I hope my boy has not inherited these from me. They are what spoil me for Percy a good deal, I believe, for they prevent my being as lively and bright-hearted as I otherwise should be. In those ways Helen was very different, and I am sometimes tempted to wish that I had been the one to die ; for if Percy had seen her instead of me, I know he would have loved her even more, and she would have made him a better wife, I feel sure, than ever I shall.'

Sir Lionel sat looking at Lady Tremaine in great astonishment as she made these confessions, so frankly and innocently She had seemed scarcely conscious of his

presence as she made them, and had not been looking his way at all, but at her little boy, whose hand she had been gently stroking all the while. Having finished, however, she turned her head, and catching the look which she had always fancied so stern on the countenance of her guest, she exclaimed hurriedly :

'Oh, Sir Lionel! Pray forgive me; I do not know what made me speak to you of these things. Let us talk of something else. Percy wrote me that you might be calling to look at some old books in our library. Do you mind telling me what they are?'

Then their real talk began—that talk which neither of them will ever forget to the end of their lives. Forsyth was amazed to find how much this gifted woman had read and thought. She had

read much, but thought more, and there was great originality, as well as force, in many of her ideas. Common-sense there was, mingled with a certain amount of romance, which made it sound more interesting. Poetry she revelled in, and had learned much by heart.

Losing all fear by degrees, she quoted to him from both verse and prose, and her quotations were always pertinent. She did not go in for every new book of the season, but revelled in the older literature. Forsyth found also that she had written a few things, though none for publication. He persuaded her to show him some of these, and found them all, whether in poetry or prose, such as might benefit other lives if published, or containing plans of life which, if carried out successfully, might benefit a nation.

Sir Lionel was delighted, and insisted on her allowing him to keep some of the best of these productions, with a view to finding a publisher for them. Then their conversation took a gayer tone, and the old butler, as he brought in tea, thought he had never seen his lady look so charming, nor heard her laugh so gleefully. After tea she sang at Sir Lionel's request. He had once heard her sing before, but not like this.

'That voice ought not to be hidden,' he thought. Then he discovered that, though too timid to sing in society, she had cultivated her voice more since her marriage than she had ever done before, that she might sing to her husband, and that she had often used it at village concerts in or near Tremaine.

'It would cause quite a sensation in London, Lady Tremaine,' said Forsyth.

'Is that your opinion, Sir Lionel? Well, I often think I should like to use it in aid of some good cause, or among the poor or sad, or in hospitals among the sick.'

'How little you seem to care for ordinary society, Lady Tremaine!'

'I do not know how it is,' she answered. Then their talk continued, and Sir Lionel forgot the library, and Lady Tremaine the time, even forgot to think of her dear twin sister. The baby had been taken upstairs by its nurse some time before tea, and as she took it, the woman had noticed a look in the child's eyes which she did not like. She made no remark, however, but while the pleasure of the two in the drawing-room was at its height, one of the house-maids came running into the room with white face and frightened eyes.

'Oh, my lady!' exclaimed the girl, 'nurse says Master Lionel is in convulsions, and she wants me to fetch the doctor at once, and will you please go upstairs, my lady?'

Myra rose, pale and trembling, and hurried from the room before Sir Lionel had time to speak. He waited there, full of anxiety, for a long time. He heard the doctor come and ascend the stairs, and then he waited until he heard him come down once more. Hastening out, he begged to know how things were going on. The doctor, who knew Sir Lionel well, told him that for the present the child was out of danger, but that the convulsions might return at any time. Leaving a courteous message with the butler for his mistress, Sir Lionel then mounted his horse, which the groom had brought round

at his desire, and rode away to the hotel in the nearest town, where he had engaged a room for the night. As he rode along, he thought of those few hours spent so delightfully in the company of Lady Tremaine. It seemed to him that they had been the happiest hours of his whole life. Then suddenly a thought struck him, which made him pull himself together. What had he been doing? He had gone to Tremaine in the hope that its mistress would speak to him of her dead twin sister, and, lo! it was she herself, the living, lovely Lady Tremaine, who had interested him. She was the one to whom his soul clave, and he knew it now. His love, the whole love of his life, was hers. He had loved her even before he knew that such a being existed. And now? Now, alas! it was too late. The twin sister was not for

him to love even as a spirit in heaven. She had possessed attributes which his ideal did not possess, but which belonged to Percy Tremaine's ideal. How strange, how passing strange, it all was! But one thing was very plain to Sir Lionel Forsyth that evening as he rode along through the pleasant country lanes. He must never, never visit Tremaine again while its master was away. And when he returned? Ah, no! It would be equally impossible to call even then.

That night, as he lay tossing restlessly on his pillow in the little provincial hotel, Sir Lionel became all at once conscious of a dim presence in the room. It knelt at his bedside! It laid a hand upon his own! It spoke his name in the sweet voice of Myra Tremaine! Then he recognised her form, spiritual yet

distinct, and the voice spoke again, sounding clear, though distant.

'Do not come to see me again,' it whispered, 'or my child will die!'

Then the vision faded slowly from the room. On his friend's yacht that night Lord Tremaine had a dream, in which one like his wife, and yet different, and with more apparent strength of will and self-reliance, came to him, and said in firm, clear tones which vibrated through his whole being: 'Write to your friend Sir Lionel, and tell him not to visit your wife.'

Lord Tremaine tried in his dream to detain his fair visitant, but she hurried away, and he saw her no more. Then he knew she was Myra's twin sister. The next day he wrote to Forsyth, telling him of this strange dream, and his friend answered him a few days later, saying that

he had called once upon Lady Tremaine, but should not be likely to do so again, as he had decided upon leaving England in a few weeks for an indefinite period. He should be sure not to see Tremaine before starting, but he hoped his friend would soon be at home again with his wife and child, and that he would find them both well on his return.

'What can he mean by going away again like this?' grumbled Lord Tremaine to himself.

Not long after he returned to his home, and his wife welcomed him gladly. Looking at his boy, he found him changed, but fairer than ever.

'He is growing like Helen,' said Myra softly.

'You are right, darling, so he is,' answered Tremaine.

Then he told his wife he had seen her sister in a dream very distinctly; but what she said to him in his dream never transpired, only Myra sometimes caught her husband looking at her in a curious manner which she could not understand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPIRIT-BRIDE.

YEARS passed on, bringing with them but few changes. Old Mrs. Amberley died, leaving all her fortune to Percy, Lord Tremaine. Sir Lionel Forsyth still remained abroad. He was not idle during his absence, but went from country to country studying the laws and customs of the people, the scenery and the climate, and the language of each. He wrote down what he observed, and he wrote, like Myra Tremaine, for the good of others, and not for his own fame.

Occasionally Lord Tremaine received a letter from his friend, and this he would pass on to his wife for her perusal, casting upon her at the same time that curious half-wistful look which she had noticed in his eyes when he returned from his yachting cruise, and which she utterly failed to understand, though it somehow brought to her always that awful night when she had stood by the crib, where lay her heart's darling hanging between life and death.

She had never dreamed of connecting his illness with the visit of Sir Lionel Forsyth until she overheard the gossiping of some chattering maid-servants in an adjoining room. One of them remarked to the other: 'It's a queer thing, this illness of young Master Tremaine. There's a sort of prophecy in the family, that

should there be any unfaithfulness between husband and wife, the direct line of heirs will fail, but my lord and lady are as true as steel, both of 'em.'

'Yes, indeed,' responded the other. 'Though they are apart, there's no one could cast a finger at either of them. Besides, the child, he'll do well enough, nurse says. He's well-nigh out of danger —for the time, at any rate.'

'Well, I only hope he'll not get another attack, that's all.'

Then the voices grew fainter.

'They cannot have known I was here,' murmured Lady Tremaine. But the words made her think. Ah, how they made her think! Surely that happy talk was not unfaithfulness. But, oh, how she had enjoyed it! How she had lost sight of everything but the present moment!

Then she began to wonder if Sir Lionel would ever come again, and at the thought her heart beat fast. A strange sound from the crib now drew her attention. The baby's face was drawn and white, and its little eyes were turning strangely. The mother took the little one in her arms, and that same instant the nurse re-entered the room.

'He shall never come again—he shall never come again,' was the unspoken decision of Lady Tremaine while the necessary precautions against another attack of convulsions in the child were in progress. And ever after that night poor Myra shunned the thought of Sir Lionel Forsyth as though he had been some evil spirit who would do her harm if she once let the thought of him enter her brain. Her life grew somewhat melancholy; she knew not why. But this she realized,

that her husband, though ever kind and considerate, seemed to look for something in her which she could not give him, that it was not quite in her nature to give him. She strove in every way to be all that he could wish, and daily developed into a stronger and more self-reliant character. But she felt that her husband now loved and clung to the boy more than to her, and that their lives were growing more and more apart. Little Lionel was a loving boy. He was devoted to both his mother and his father, and he had one dear little friend close by, the daughter of the Rector of Tremaine, a child who was a few months his junior.

'Mother, when shall I be old enough to marry Mabel?' the boy asked Lady Tremaine one day, when she had been reading him a story about a wedding.

'Not for a long time yet, darling,' answered Myra.

But the thought of marrying Mabel fixed itself on the mind of the child and never left it. When he was nineteen, and at college, he came to his mother one day in the summer holidays and told her that he and Mabel were engaged, and when only twenty-one he announced his intention of marrying her. The young lady was quite willing, and such was the strong will of the boy, that he soon persuaded both parents to consent to this early union. His will had been trained to bend to their authority, but here it asserted itself, and Lord Tremaine declared that, as the boy knew his own mind so well, he should not be thwarted; in fact, he rather admired his son for his determination.

The young couple were to live at Tremaine, and for their honeymoon they went to the South of France, it being early in the year. But, as had happened in the case of Lord and Lady Tremaine, they were recalled before their honeymoon was over by a messenger of death. Strange was the coincidence, but when the young couple reached Tremaine they found their father lying unconscious upon his bed. He had been thrown from his horse, which had taken fright at some shadows in its path, and he had fallen on a heap of stones, which had injured his head so much that he never again regained consciousness. The day after the arrival of the bride and bridegroom he died, without having recognised his wife or any of those around him.

Deep was the sadness which reigned in

that usually peaceful household. Lord Tremaine had been beloved by all; indeed, there was nothing in his nature to excite any feeling save of love and goodwill towards him, and the shadow of sorrow hung like a pall over the blighted hearts in the household.

The young couple remained quietly at Tremaine during the whole summer, and a few very near and dear friends visited them from time to time. Lady Tremaine, however, sought the dower-house, and there took up her abode. She said the Lord and Lady of Tremaine were best alone. Her own mother was a widow also, and she left Histringham at this time to pay a long visit to her daughter.

The Dowager Lady Tremaine, as Myra must now be designated, lived very quietly at the old dower-house. She wrote a

good deal, and some of her writings were published, and brought her honour, for they were all alike in their purity, and truth, and innate perception of character, as well as in their aim to do good to those who might read them.

The voice which of late years had been heard in London concerts for the benefit of the poor or sick was stilled for the present, or only used for the gratification of those who were nearest and dearest to her. Myra and her daughter-in-law were a great deal together, for the latter loved to ask the advice of the Dowager on various matters, in which the elder lady had had much more experience than the younger, and the Rector and his wife were also her firm friends. Thus more than a year passed quietly away. One night, when writing in her study, Myra fell

asleep, and dreamed that her husband came to her holding the hand of her beloved twin sister. He looked upon his widow with that old curious look, which had, however, now lost its wistfulness, and said: 'Myra, we are happy, Helen and I. We have been happy always since we became spirits, but now we have each other we are happier than ever. Why will you not be happy also?'

That same night Sir Lionel Forsyth had a dream of an exactly similar nature. He had heard with sorrow, and even with tears, of his friend's sad death, for that friend and he had been as brothers in the bygone days. Then he was tempted to hurry to England, he scarcely knew why. But no, that would not do at all; so second thoughts told him.

In the night when the dream came to

him like a vision, he started up, and cried in a voice of the utmost tenderness: 'Ah, my love! my dear, dear Myra!' And the Dowager Lady Tremaine, awakening from her dream, saw him there, and felt the clasp of his outstretched hand, and heard the intensely spoken words as once in the old days he had seen and heard and felt her near him when she was, in reality, miles away. Myra dared not dwell upon the experiences of that night; but some light dawned upon her soul about her husband and her twin sister, and she murmured:

'Yes; Helen was the one for him, and I felt it all the time. I only loved him as a brother.'

CHAPTER X.

HINDERED LOVE.

NEVER had such deep, such intense feeling throbbed through the veins of Sir Lionel Forsyth as when he at last stood at the door of Lady Tremaine's town-house in Weston Square. He had been rather surprised to learn, on his return to England, that she was in London, and he hastened to pay his respects to her. Several other guests were also present that afternoon, but Sir Lionel had ample opportunity for noting the change in Myra. She certainly was altered; but it

seemed as though her charms were still ripening to perfection. Full summer-time it was with her; and as summer time is the perfection of the year, so the summer of her life was to Lady Tremaine. When the name of Sir Lionel Forsyth was announced, it appeared to her for a moment as though everything became blank. Her other guests entirely disappeared from her vision, and she saw only the one who had just entered.

She gave him her hand, growing paler as she did so; and yet, to all those present, her manner appeared dignity and calmness itself. She might even have been considered as giving a rather cold greeting to the man who had so long been absent from his native land.

His entrance caused quite a stir, for there were some persons in the room who

had known Sir Lionel well before he left England, and all of them had heard his name. So there was a good deal of gush and welcome ; and while this lasted, Lady Tremaine was able to compose herself a little. She introduced Sir Lionel to her mother, and he immediately seated himself beside the old lady, who soon became deeply interested in the account of his travels which was elicited from him by the other guests. He waited until all were gone, and began to enjoy his visit when he and Myra were alone, her mother having left the room to take her afternoon nap. There was a moment of half-embarrassed silence, and then the ice was broken, and conversation flowed delightfully between those two who had for years been so near one another in spirit, but so far separated in every other way. It was like

a continuation of that other talk which they had enjoyed together so many years before; but there were important differences. Myra spoke much of her husband, who had now been in his grave for more than a year. She told of all his goodness, of his love for his boy, of his tenderness and thought for herself, and of his true affection for his friend Forsyth. There were tears in the eyes of both as they thus conversed.

Neither of them mentioned the dream of Percy and Helen, which had brought Lionel Forsyth home from his wanderings, and which had also led him to Weston Square that afternoon. Their talk was the talk of friends, but it was the talk of friends who feel that the deepest, truest, most loving kinship of soul exists between them.

Then Sir Lionel spoke of his travels in a different way to that in which he had narrated his experiences while the other guests had remained. He went deeper now, and described his work, his plans, his intercourse with the great of many nations, who had explained to him their politics, and sometimes their most secret plans for their nation's good. Also the habits of private life in many lands were explained to Myra, the peculiarities of the different religions and modes of life, the kinds of climate which seemed best to agree with mankind, and the ways of living which seemed best suited to the general health. The modes and manners of many nations were also discussed; and all Sir Lionel's information was drawn from his own personal observation and experience with the various peoples. Myra was

greatly interested, for she felt that her work and her writing for the good of others would be helped and forwarded by this conversation. Sir Lionel, before taking his leave, promised to call again, bringing with him some of his sketches, the plans he had drawn out, and the observations which he had jotted down upon various subjects of interest.

The two as they parted looked forward eagerly to their next meeting, which proved even more interesting to each of them than the first had been. Indeed, they seemed to grow together, so that before a word of love was uttered they were one indeed in heart and spirit. But one evening, after leaving Myra, Sir Lionel was so filled with a deep and passionate yearning that he could not rest one night longer without pouring out his

love, or, rather, some of it, for so much was hidden away in the recesses of his great, pure, manly heart that it could not be told in words. He wrote to Myra, however, and described to her the dream in which he had seen Tremaine and Helen hand-in-hand.

'They are happy, for they told me so,' he wrote; 'and Tremaine begged me to be happy also. I have never known earthly happiness since I met you. My life has been one long dissatisfaction, so far as the affections were concerned.' Then he told her what had never been imparted to her by her husband—how Tremaine and he had often talked of the twin sisters they would like to meet and wed, and what were the differences between the two; and how he believed that the living one was really his kindred soul,

while Tremaine's was the lovely Helen, who had been in heaven so long. He had found her now, it seemed, and would not Myra become his own to cherish and love for ever?

Myra, when she received this letter, sat for a long time as in a dream. Could it be? Was such happiness to become hers? Had she found a love greater than that of her twin sister? Was she even more in love with this man than with that dear kindred soul? Yes, she believed it was so. Filled with an unutterable joy, she sat down and wrote an answer—short, but, oh! so convincing. She thought she would post this herself, trusting it to no hands but her own. As she left her house on her way to the post-office, a telegraph-boy ran up the steps with a message for her. Lady Tremaine

took it from him, and on opening it gave a little cry, for the words, 'Come at once ; Lionel very ill,' met her gaze, and she hurried into the house, white and trembling.

The telegram was from Tremaine, and it was her own dear son Lionel who was ill. Soon she was on her way to him, and found him suffering from inflammation of the lungs and pleurisy. The poor little wife was nearly wild with grief, but the Dowager tried to keep calm for the sake of the dear one who lay there so full of suffering. He was at death's door for many days, and on one of these days Myra sat down and wrote another answer to the anxious, waiting Sir Lionel Forsyth, intimating that, even though she had not taken the vow which it was the custom for the brides of the heirs of Tremaine to

take, she could on no account marry Sir Lionel, for the prophecy of old John Tremaine still seemed to hold. Then she told him of her first letter and its contents, and what had hindered her from sending it. She would always consider Sir Lionel her best and dearest friend, of that he might be sure, but no more could she accord to him than this.

As he read this letter, a terrible blank fell upon Sir Lionel Forsyth. He suffered so keenly that he grew old, haggard, and gray in a few days. He strove against his anguish, but to no purpose.

'Surely I am not going to die,' he thought. 'But no; such a release, I fear, is not for me. I must live and struggle on.'

And the Dowager Lady Tremaine was suffering from an agony no less keen than his own.

Young Lord Tremaine recovered slowly but surely, and when his mother had seen him safely off to spend the winter in the Canaries with his wife, she went once more in sad and lonely grief to the dower-house, not even having her mother with her, for before Sir Lionel's letter had arrived the old lady had left London to visit friends in Scotland.

One day, when trying unsuccessfully to fix her attention on a book of poems, Lady Tremaine was roused by the sound of horses' hoofs coming up the drive, and in another moment Sir Lionel Forsyth was announced.

Ah, the change that came over them as each caught sight of the other's face!

'My darling!' were the words that burst passionately from the lips of Sir Lionel, as he took both Myra's hands in his own,

and held them in a warm, tight clasp. 'My darling!' he said again, when they were seated, he still holding her hands. 'Are you quite determined not to come to me?'

'Quite,' she answered sadly but firmly.

'Still, my dearest, my only one, can we not be friends indeed?'

Her eyes brightened, and a glow suffused her cheeks.

'Oh yes, Sir Lionel, let us be friends always—always!'

To her surprise, as she uttered these words he stooped and kissed her. And that kiss! It seemed as though she had never been kissed before, it was so intense, so passionate. She started, however, and looked half reproachfully at him.

'When I say friends,' he continued, 'I mean friends in the very best and highest

sense of the word. Myra, let me speak plainly to you. I consider that the times are past when men and women who care for each other as we do, but who for some reason cannot marry, need keep apart from one another in spirit as well as flesh. Surely the lower part of our natures need not be so prominent as to make marriage a necessity for pure living. I know it is so with some, but that is because they and their ancestors have cultivated that part of their natures almost to the exclusion of the higher. I, however, have not done this, neither have you. My life has been purely passed, and other interests than those which fill the early life of many men have been mine. My passions are now under my own control, and when I might fail, a higher Power, in whom I trust, controls me. Indeed, I know that, but for my con-

fidence in that higher Power, I should have failed. My father was a good man and a pure, and I have no bad inherited tendencies, I believe. You are the earthly light of my life, my darling. If it had not been for that higher light, even the "Light of the World," I should have walked in darkness ever since I first met you. He has sustained me, and given me work to do, and I have lived in health and freedom. Therefore, my beloved, I come to you, and ask you to give me your pure friendship, in heart and spirit, that we may be together much, holding much sweet converse, and doing much of our life-work together. Then I will ask nothing of you but the purest and highest and best in your nature. My love! my life! my dearest! will you consent to this?'

CHAPTER XI.

A PURE FRIENDSHIP.

When Sir Lionel made this speech, he was still holding the delicate, trembling hands of Myra Tremaine in his own. She had kept very still as he proceeded, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

The expression of her face, however, grew more and more radiant, for all he said coincided so exactly with her own state of mind. Lady Tremaine had often been deeply pained at the scandal of Society, and also at the inability of the sex who boast of their superior strength, to live

in pleasant and close friendship with what they are pleased to call the 'weaker sex,' without in some way losing their own self-respect, and helping their so-called 'friends' to do the same. She felt that it was sin alone, and the indulgence in it, that made men so really weak, and longed much for a purer social atmosphere in her land, which she loved, and placed high among the nations of the earth in her own pure, innocent mind. It was indeed refreshing to hear this man speak so of his own life, and to hear him ask her to be his friend in the truest, purest manner in which men and women can be friends.

Looking up, she caught the expression of his face. It was that expression which she had often fancied stern, and which half frightened her even now, as she realized how much power this man held over her.

'Sir Lionel,' she said, in a low, clear voice, 'I am glad you have spoken to me like this, and I will be your friend, if only you are not afraid of what the world may say.'

'Are you afraid of that, Myra?' and the stern face grew sterner—at least, so it appeared to the woman who sat there all trembling with her great joy. Her lips broke into a smile at this question, and she slightly shook her head. There was no need for words.

Sir Lionel looked gratified. 'My dear one,' he said, 'neither am I afraid. We know that strange things will be said. But our lives shall live all scandal down. Still, if ever you should feel that the reason for your denying me marriage has disappeared, then tell me, my beloved.'

Mrs. Vivian returned in another day or two, and again took up her abode with

her daughter, who explained to her all that had happened in her absence, for not even in a letter had Myra told her mother of the love of Sir Lionel Forsyth.

'Stay with me, dear mother,' she said, 'and never leave me any more. I shall want you, and need you much.'

'My dear, I will stay with you, of course, but, if I were you, I should cast away that old superstition and marry Sir Lionel, as he has asked you to do.'

'I think I almost would, if it were not for my own boy Lionel. But I am sure, if he knew all, he would feel I had no right to break through the old family traditions. And, besides, I am so happy as it is, and so glad to prove that Sir Lionel's love is of so high a nature that I hardly wish for marriage. Mother dear, there are so few men like that, you know.'

'Well, my dear, I am glad to see you happy. I can trust Sir Lionel Forsyth, and I will stay with you, and be all the help to you I can,' answered Mrs. Vivian, upon which Myra threw her arms round her mother's neck and kissed her.

When the young Lord and Lady Tremaine returned home, they were met by the Dowager, who looked so young and lovely, in spite of her forty years, that they were quite struck with admiration for her.

'Dear mother!' cried Lionel. 'What have you been doing to yourself? I never saw you look so sweet and handsome in my life, and yet I have always boasted to other fellows that I possessed the most beautiful mother in the British Islands.'

The gentle young Lady Tremaine nestled close up to her mother-in-law, and kissed her and looked into her eyes.

Lord Tremaine's illness had drawn these two very close together.

'You looked so very ill when we left home that I feared you were going to break down altogether,' she said. 'But now all that has passed, and I am very, very glad.'

'Thank you, dearest,' responded the Dowager, 'and I think I must tell you all about it. For there is a reason for my looking well. The truth is I have found a friend, and we have begun to work together, and it is so much better and happier to have a friend to work with than it is to work alone.'

'I can quite understand that, mother,' said Lord Tremaine. 'But tell us—surely you are not married again? You have not got a new father to show us, have you?'

'Oh no!' and a vivid blush passed over the face of the elder lady. 'It is, as I said, only a friend that I have found. He was your father's friend, Lionel, and though you have never seen him, I think you have very often heard of him.'

'What! Not Sir Lionel Forsyth, is it?'

'Yes, dear, the same. He came to me in my loneliness, and we have arranged to work and write together for the good of others, and so hold converse together for our mutual benefit. He is staying at the dower-house now with your grandmother and me, and later in the evening he will call to see you. He is a good man and a true, as well as a learned and cultured one.'

'I am sure of that, mother, and you know, Mabel, how my father used to praise that man. Why, nothing he could say seemed good enough to express his ad-

miration of him. He said he was above all other men in honour and purity of soul, and in high-mindedness and generosity; besides all which he was downright jolly—not a bit of a prig. And he went to school with father. I am glad, so glad, that he is coming here to-night.'

'So am I, Li. But tell me, did I not once hear that he, too, had taken the Tremaine vows?'

'Yes, when father and he were at school together; father used to say that it had been the greatest help to him all through his life, having Lionel Forsyth for his friend, and when I was born, he thought that he and mother could do no better than call me after such a man. And I am proud of my name.'

'He writes a great deal, does he not?' asked Mabel Tremaine.

'Yes, and on the same subjects as mother writes. But you can always tell it is a man who has written his books and articles. Well, mother dear, I think you and he will be a splendid help to one another. How long is he intending to stay at Tremaine?'

'Not for long, Lionel,' answered the Dowager; 'for he has affairs at Rocky Cliffe which require his attention; still, I hope you will often meet.'

Time passed on. The world, of course, had its fling at the constant and close friendship and companionship of Sir Lionel Forsyth and the Dowager Lady Tremaine. But the shafts fell unheeded, and ere long, seeing that the best and wisest in the land recognised and honoured them both, the scandalmongers began to subside, and before another year had rolled away these

two had become great features in London society.

Lady Tremaine's dinners and 'at homes' were the interests of the season. At her house were entertained the brightest lights in the world of pure and edifying literature, and also many well-known philanthropists and statesmen. Together with Sir Lionel Forsyth, she published books which were not only full of interest, but full of pure and high-minded thoughts and tender grace and imagery.

All who read them were convinced of the pure morals of the writers, and the names of Lady Tremaine and Sir Lionel Forsyth came to be among the most honoured in the land.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPELL BROKEN, AND LOVE TRIUMPHANT.

'SIR LIONEL, why do you not marry?'

This abrupt question was put to the master of Rocky Cliffe by young Lord Tremaine one Christmas night, when he and his wife were spending a few weeks there. All the other guests had retired, and Sir Lionel and his namesake were in the cosy smoke-room alone. The former was much surprised at the question, for his young friend was in the habit of treating him with great respect; indeed, no one took liberties with Sir Lionel,

except little children and animals. However, he smiled indulgently, and answered :

'I have so much in my life to interest and occupy me, Lionel, that I do not miss much, I think, by not marrying.'

'I don't know about that ; I find married life very pleasant, and should not at all like to be a bachelor.'

'Perhaps not. But you love your wife, and married life without love is not at all a comfortable state of existence, I should imagine.'

'Then, is love an impossibility to you? You are not old yet; I have known men in love at past your age.'

'Lionel,' replied his host, starting up and laying down his cigar, 'I have never hinted to you or to anyone else before that there is one woman whom I love, and have loved all through my manhood—nay, before

I knew her even. Before I was grown to man's estate I loved her, Lionel, but I cannot marry her.'

'You do not mean my mother, Sir Lionel?'

'Yes, I mean your mother,' answered the elder man steadily.

'And will she not love you? You are such great friends, always talking and working together.'

'Yes, we are friends, and she loves me; but how can we marry when there is always your ancestor's prophecy confronting us?'

'Oh, that old superstition; I do not see that it can matter in my mother's case, for she never took the vow precluding a second marriage. My father told me so; and he said it would be just as well that neither my wife nor myself should take it either, only we were both quite deter-

mined to do so. We were such infants, you see; but I know I, for one, shall never regret having taken it. Still, it is a narrow-minded pledge, and the prophecy must have lapsed by this time. Still, Sir Lionel, you ought to marry someone, I think, if only to keep your name alive. It will quite die out with you, I believe?'

'Yes, that is true. But what does it matter, so that someone who will tend the property owns it? I have always done my very best for it, and when away from England was in constant communication with my most trustworthy agent, Sykes. You shall have the property, Li, and the title may die out if it likes.'

'Oh, I say, Sir Lionel,' cried the young man, 'you would not make me responsible for your estates as well as my own, would you?'

'Yes, I would; and shall, most likely, Li.'

'Well, there's one good thing, and that is, that it will be a long, long time first. But I would rather you married, and still think, if you won't consider me rude for saying it, that it would be better for you all round.'

'I don't suppose there are many happier or more contented men than myself anywhere, Li,' answered Sir Lionel with a smile.

'No, perhaps not. But you would be happier still if you were married; and if my mother loves you, as you say, why ever don't you get her to put aside that superstition? I loved my father dearly, but I feel sure he would not grudge my mother to you now.'

'No, my boy, I don't think he would.'

'And as for the direct line dying out, I don't believe there's an atom of truth about it. Here am I, healthy and well, and my boy a year old now, and as strong and lusty a little rebel as you may wish to see. And as for vows, I have just as much right to institute them as old John Tremaine had, and prophecies too, for that matter; and I'll tell you what I have for some time had it on my mind to do, Sir Lionel, and I've quite decided about it now. I'm going to do away altogether with that vow, but the part about unfaithfulness may stand. I shall make a new prophecy to the effect that to act according to the rules of common-sense will be the best method of preserving the line intact.'

'Well spoken, my dear fellow—well spoken!' said Sir Lionel approvingly.

'And you must speak to my mother about it to-morrow, Christmas Day, please, Sir Lionel; for Christmas Day is a good day to get engaged upon, I think.'

Sir Lionel laughed.

'You mean to have it all your own way, I see,' he said.

'Well, I believe it is my fault that you have been kept apart so long. If I had not been an ass, I should have understood it before this. I never saw two people happier in one another's society than you and the mater, bless her! I know some would say that marriage would lessen your enjoyment in one another's society; but you are above that sort of thing.'

Sir Lionel was gazing into the fire with a look on his face which almost startled the young man before him, who could hardly understand such intense feeling as

he saw depicted on the countenance of the other.

'Above that sort of thing,' he murmured to himself, as though the presence of Lord Tremaine had been forgotten altogether. 'Above that sort of thing! I hope so indeed. Enjoy your society less, my beloved: could I?'

After this, the young lord knew that Sir Lionel did indeed love his mother.

The next morning Lionel Tremaine brought a number of papers to the Dowager's room.

'Look!' said he; 'I have drawn up a new and revised edition of some of those vows and prophecies, for I am convinced that old John Tremaine had no more right to lay down the law than I have. Read these, mother, and tell me what you think.'

The Dowager Lady Tremaine read

carefully the manuscript that had been drawn up by her son.

'My dear boy, this is very good and sensible,' she said.

'I only heard last night, dear mother, that you had refused to get married again on account of that old prophecy of John Tremaine's,' remarked Lionel.

'Did Sir Lionel tell you about that?'

'He told me something; but, mother, let me know all.'

Then Lady Tremaine told how she had been on the point of accepting Sir Lionel Forsyth, when the telegram came announcing her son's illness, and how that had caused her to remember the prophecy, and to think there might be something in it.

'No, mother; believe me, it is only an old superstition,' said the young man.

That day Sir Lionel, seeing young Lord Tremaine had no fears for the future of his house, asked Myra once more to be his wife; and she, being encouraged by her son's action that morning, accepted him. And as she did so, she felt that under any circumstances she could not have refused him again; for her trust in him, and her reverence for him, had so grown and perfected.

There was much rejoicing when the wedding was celebrated, and the two who had been one in spirit for so long were wholly joined in life-fellowship. The bridegroom was fifty years old, and the bride forty-two, but their love was as passionate and devoted as that of any young couple could have been; and it seemed to them now as if it grew deeper

and more intense with every passing hour. Their companionship was so perfect, and their natures dovetailed so sweetly one into the other, that of all life unions this seemed to be among the very happiest.

Another year passed swiftly, during the earlier part of which Sir Lionel and Lady Forsyth travelled a good deal. Then, early in the following year, their life-work took a new turn, for a little son and heir was given to the house of Forsyth, for which gift both father and mother thanked God and rejoiced. The child only seemed to draw them nearer to one another in that precious union which partook so much of the nature of a spirit union, and he also made their lives brighter and more blessed to others. And so far from their union by marriage causing the heirs of the line of Tremaine to fail, it happened that, on the

very same day little Percy Forsyth was born, Lady Tremaine presented her husband with two beautiful twin boys.

And so the spell of old John Tremaine's strange vows and prophecies was broken for ever, and twin souls, unhindered, found the joy and blessedness of pure human fellowship in honourable marriage bonds. The laws of God which govern life associations, if simply obeyed, need no support from the whims and eccentricities of men's self-willed rules. In family life and in human relations, as everywhere else, the law holds good, that 'righteousness tendeth unto life.'

THE END.

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